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Spanish and Creole: Exploring Aspects of Minority and Minoritised Languages in Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago

Introduction

The present study provides an exploratory overview of the role and status of the Spanish and Creole languages in two English-speaking Caribbean nations, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago. This snapshot of the current sociolinguistic situation is viewed through the lens of the theoretical model of language policy proposed by the New Zealand-Israeli sociolinguist Bernard Spolsky (2004). As will be outlined subsequently, although there is already a significant body of research regarding various aspects of language policy relating to both of the countries under analysis, there is a distinct lack of comparative work exploring the situation of the Spanish and Creole languages in the relevant Jamaican and Trinidad & Tobago contexts.

Although Spanish is of course one of the world's major international languages, in Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago it is certainly a minority language in terms of the low number of speakers; conversely, though local Creole languages are spoken widely in both countries, these tongues lack status, prestige, and broader recognition. Hence, as part of the author's wider project examining multilingualism, translation, and interpreting in the Anglophone

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Caribbean focusing on Trinidad & Tobago (for some other related publications, please see Hoyte-West, 2021, 2022), this study aims to offer a brief preliminary literature-based overview of the present situation in the two case studies using Spolsky's (2004) model of language policy, thus ensuring a foundation for further in-depth empirical research.

Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago: A historical and societal overview

As with the entirety of the Western Hemisphere, the history and societies of the various Caribbean islands over the last five centuries have been marked by European colonisation, slavery, and mass migration. As also noted in Hoyte-West (2021), the list of colonial powers in the region has included not only prominent seafaring empires such as Great Britain, France, and Spain, but also others such as the Duchy of Courland (now part of the territory of modern-day Latvia), the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, and the United States. With the indigenous Amerindian inhabitants of many of the islands virtually eradicated, the colonised possessions were subsequently populated with transplanted populations of Africans, East Indians, and Europeans to ensure the success of these plantation economies. Ethical and moral considerations notwithstanding, these conditions created ideal situations for language contact and the creation of new pidgins and creoles based on the mixing of various languages.

Accordingly, many Caribbean islands have developed their own creolised languages arising primarily from contact between various European and African languages. However, in terms of official languages, only two of these creoles have attained recognition as state languages within the wider Caribbean: Papiamento and Haitian Creole. The former is spoken in Aruba and Curaçao, two constituent countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Dutch is another official language of both islands, and English also has official status in Curaçao (*Over Aruba*, 2021; *Over Curaçao*, 2021). In Haiti, which was formerly the French colony of Saint-Domingue until 1803, the country's constitution recognises Haitian Creole as one of the nation's official languages alongside French (DeGraff, 2007, p. 101). Yet in the Anglophone Caribbean, however, none of the creolised variants have received any form of official status to date. Indeed, the continuing linguistic dominance of European languages within the region is highlighted by the fact that the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has only designated English, together with French and Dutch, as the organisation's official working languages (CARICOM, 2021).

Turning to the two case studies under analysis, the Anglophone Caribbean is often viewed from afar as one homogenous unit. At the end of the British colonial era, there were attempts to unify the English-speaking islands as one nation under the auspices of the West Indies Federation (1958–1962). Ultimately, this initiative fell apart due to the significant economic, social, and cultural differences between the various islands, as well as to the strong sense of island-based identity, which culminated in the withdrawal of first Jamaica, then Trinidad & Tobago from the project (for more information, see Glassner, 1970; Wallace, 1962). Some common endeavours have been successful, however, and these include the federal University of West Indies (UWI), which has campuses on several different islands, as well as the famed West Indies cricket team, which is composed of players from across the Anglophone Caribbean.

Table 1: Relevant data about Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago

	Jamaica	**Trinidad & Tobago**
Land area	10,991 km^2	5,130 km^2
Population	c. 2.7 million	c. 1.4 million
Independence from the United Kingdom	6 August 1962	31 August 1962
Official language	English	English
Other languages	Jamaican Creole, Spanish	Trinidad & Tobago English Creole, Spanish

Source: Compiled by the author, based on Black et al. (2021), and Robinson et al. (2021)

Of the various Caribbean islands, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago are the two largest English-speaking countries in this region of small states. In terms of geography, Jamaica is the third largest island in the wider Caribbean; only Cuba and the island of Hispaniola, which is shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic, have a greater surface area. As outlined in the above table, with a current population of 2.7 million, the island has a history marked by colonisation. Originally inhabited by the Taino people, it was claimed for Spain by Christopher Columbus in 1494 and remained a Spanish colony until 1655. The island formed part of the British Empire until it received independence in 1962, and the country remains part of the Commonwealth with the Queen as head of state (Black et al., 2021). As such, Jamaica was a traditional plantation economy founded on slavery, and thus the overwhelming

majority of the population is of African descent (92%), with smaller minorities of Europeans, East Indians, and also Maroons – the descendants of enslaved Africans who had escaped into the interior of the island and intermarried with the surviving Taino who lived there. In terms of religious confessions, the dominant religion is Christianity, with smaller groups of adherents of Hinduism, Islam, Rastafarianism, and Judaism (Black et al., 2021).

As noted above, Jamaica has only one official language, English, but Jamaican Creole (also known variously as *patois*, *patwah*, *patwa*, or simply as 'Jamaican'), is widely spoken across society, yet does not have any official status at present. As described extensively elsewhere (for example, Patrick, 2008), it is an English-based creole and possesses a degree of mutual intelligibility with Standard Jamaican English, the languages sharing a typological continuum (see, for example, Harry, 2006) rather than exemplifying a case of true diglossia in Fergusonian terms (Ferguson, 1959). Formed due to language contact between African languages and English, Jamaican Creole dates back several centuries, and as such, a writing system has been developed with its own literature and poetry (Sand, 2013).

As also depicted in the above table, the dual island nation of Trinidad & Tobago is much smaller than Jamaica, both in terms of its population of 1.4 million people as well as in its land area. The larger of the two islands which comprise the country, Trinidad, is situated close to the Venezuelan mainland and the Orinoco delta, whereas Tobago is the southernmost member of the Lesser Antilles chain of islands. Before Columbus claimed the islands for Spain in 1498, their original inhabitants were Arawak and Carib peoples. Trinidad remained a Spanish possession – albeit with a strong Francophone influence – until 1797, when it was annexed by the British. On the other hand, Tobago definitively became British in 1814, before which the island had been variously a possession of Spain, Great Britain, and France, as well as the Netherlands and the Duchy of Courland. Under British rule, the two colonies were linked together as one entity in the late nineteenth century. Like Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago also became an independent nation in 1962, and it too is a member of the Commonwealth, albeit as a fully independent republic.

Unlike Jamaica, the ethnic composition of Trinidad & Tobago is extremely diverse, and is notable in that no one particular group represents a majority. As such, the country includes people with East Indian (35% of the population), black (34%), mixed (23%), and white backgrounds (1%), with smaller groups of people with Amerindian and Chinese ancestry. Confessional diversity is also marked, with the country recognising four official religions: Christianity (around 50%), Hinduism (20%), and Islam (20%) (Robinson et al., 2021),

as well as the Spiritual Baptist faith, a syncretic religion with Christian and African influences (National Library and Information System Authority, 2021). As also noted elsewhere in greater detail (Hoyte-West, 2021, pp. 236–237), this religious and ethnic plurality at domestic level has not led to the equivalent recognition of multilingualism, with English being the country's only official language. This is despite the presence – both historically and in the contemporary era – of many other tongues. These include or have included languages such as Spanish and Hindi, but the major defining feature of the historical and contemporary sociolinguistic context of Trinidad & Tobago, however, has been the presence of two different creole languages: Trinidadian French Creole and Trinidad & Tobago English Creole. As a legacy from the influx of Francophone plantation owners and their slaves, the first, Trinidadian French Creole, also known as *patois*, was widely spoken during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Mühleisen, 2013), but is now moribund. The dominant creole language at present, however, is Trinidad & Tobago English Creole, which is spoken widely in the country and – as with Jamaican Creole – forms a linguistic continuum with standard Trinidad & Tobago English, with which it has a high degree of mutual intelligibility (see Mühleisen, 2013; Stell, 2018; Winer, 1989).

Theoretical and methodological considerations

As noted in the introduction, the theoretical framework for this study is provided by the language policy model outlined by the eminent sociolinguist Bernard Spolsky. In his book *Language Policy* (Spolsky, 2004), he delineated a theoretical model which was later developed further in two additional publications (Spolsky, 2007, 2019). In short, the framework focuses on four key concepts – firstly, the role of national ideology; then the role of English as a global language in the context under analysis; subsequently, the sociolinguistic situation of a given country; and finally, the role of minority language rights. In articulating these four main concepts, Spolsky's (2004) model provides a useful approach for discussing language management at the macro level (for example, via governments and other authorities), as well as through language beliefs and ideology at the community level, and also via the specific language practices of individuals within a given sociolinguistic context.

Indeed, Spolsky's framework has been tested via numerous case studies in several jurisdictions, including Iceland (Albury, 2016), Malaysia (Albury & Aye, 2016), the city of Alicante in Spain (Burgess, 2017), as well as in Flanders (Van Oss et al., 2022), and elements of it have

also been applied to highly-specialised case studies – for example, Sternberg-Sirén's (2021) recent study on Swedish language media planning in Finland during the Covid-19 pandemic. To date, however, it appears that the model has not yet been applied to the Caribbean context, and accordingly the following research question was devised: How does Spolsky's (2004) theoretical model of language policy apply to the Jamaican and Trinidad & Tobago contexts, with particular regard to the roles of Creole and Spanish?

As an exploratory study, the present analysis builds on the author's previous work on multilingualism in the Trinidad & Tobago context (Hoyte-West, 2021, 2022). In common with the majority of the previous research projects mentioned above (Albury, 2016; Albury & Aye, 2016; Burgess, 2017), a qualitative methodological perspective was adopted. In following this approach, and in common with some of the author's previous studies (for example, see Hoyte-West, 2019, 2021, 2022), the analysis was focused on the examination of relevant literature-based resources such as newspapers, academic and government websites, as well as relevant scholarly material such as journal articles. As noted in Hoyte-West (2021), and especially given the constraints – temporal, geographical, and otherwise – imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, it was intended to provide a good basis for deeper empirical work in the future.

Spolsky's model as applied to the Jamaican and Trinidad & Tobago contexts

As outlined above, the first aspect of Spolsky's (2004) model concerns national ideology. In this regard, both Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago can be considered as relatively 'new' nations, having received independence from Britain just six decades ago. Both countries have a strongly developed sense of national and cultural identity. In the Jamaican case, Burton (2009, p. 11) highlights the fact that the country's cultural fluidity and fusion of various identities is an embodiment of the noted Caribbean poet and scholar Kamau Brathwaite's (1971) notion of a Creole society. In Trinidad & Tobago, the country's considerable ethnic and religious diversity is accommodated, as Brereton (2007) underscores, within the country's national narrative. An example of this can be seen in public holidays occurring for Easter, Christmas, and Eid al-Fitr, as well as Indian Arrival Day, Emancipation Day, and the Spiritual Baptist Day (TT Connect, 2021).

In linguistic terms, however, despite the omnipresence of creole languages in both Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, there is no acknowledgement of this fact on official government websites, much less any form of sample text or translation. Jamaican Creole does not have official status in the country, despite the fact that the language has been recognised internationally; in the past, the UK-based Chartered Institute of Linguists even offered the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI) qualification between Jamaican Creole and English (Devonish, 2011), though this no longer appears to be the case.

A similar state of affairs exists with regard to the English-based creole of Trinidad & Tobago: despite proposed standardisation attempts (see Winer, 1990), the language has no official recognition, lacks societal status, and its use in public life is limited. However, it is celebrated as a key part of the country's calypso music (Winer, 1986), where the songs use the language to draw attention to topical and other issues in a witty and impactful way. Although its use in literature is generally rather limited, the novel *Love After Love* (Persaud, 2021), written partly in Trinidadian English Creole, won the prestigious United Kingdom-based Costa First Novel Award in 2020. The focus of the Trinidad & Tobago government's recent linguistic efforts, however, has been the implementation of Spanish as the country's first foreign language. This initiative, known by the acronym SAFFL (Spanish As the First Foreign Language) has been described extensively elsewhere (Hoyte-West, 2021). Despite the fact that Spanish as a native language has historically been spoken by a tiny minority of Trinidadians (Moodie, 1973) – indeed, a figure notably smaller than 1% of the population (Lipski, 1990, p. 9) – the SAFFL policy was launched in 2004. The impetus was primarily for economic reasons, which became irrelevant owing to the global economic downturn. And as regards the role of Spanish in the Jamaican context, the language is taught widely in the country's schools and universities (Rodríguez Castellano, 2006). Indeed, in 2018 the country's prime minister, Andrew Holness, called for Spanish to be recognised as Jamaica's "official foreign language" (Davis, 2018). However, at the time of writing it appears that this stated desire has had no significant bearing on the official status of the language in the country.

The second aspect of Spolsky's (2004) model foregrounds the role of English in a given country. As noted by de Swaan (2001), English is indeed the "supercentral" global language. As the sole official language of both Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, it is dominant in the education sector and in all aspects of public life, where – as mentioned previously – it forms part of a linguistic continuum with the relevant Creoles (Deuber, 2014). Yet, taking an example

from the Jamaican context, Jamaican Creole still suffers from low status and prestige as it is commonly viewed as simply a 'broken' form of English. As Frank (2010) observes, it can be argued that this represents an extension of negative colonial perceptions from British rule. In addition, the competitive advantage and economic clout that the Anglophone Caribbean nations wield by virtue of being natively English-speaking is considerable, especially given the important role (see, for example Daly, 2015; Gmelch, 2012, etc.) that English plays not only in mass tourism, but also English-language study abroad and linguistic training programmes such as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses. In both Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica, Spanish is ostensibly considered a prestigious additional foreign language which, as demonstrated by the statements voiced by both governments, could be an additional source of competitive economic and cultural capital for the two countries. However, in the Trinidad & Tobago context, it can be argued that, as observed by Bristow and Wyss (2021), wider language attitudes towards Spanish may be changing owing to the difficulties posed by the Venezuelan situation and the impact of mass migration on the country; further research on this timely topic is certainly needed. In terms of the two Creole tongues, these languages – as noted above – do not generally feature in official life at all; there is, however, some activism in Jamaica, but very little in Trinidad & Tobago.

The third component of Spolsky's (2004) framework involves sociolinguistic diversity. As stated previously, the ethnic composition of the entirety of the Anglophone Caribbean is the result of (forced) migration, and Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago are no exceptions. Previous multilingualism in centuries past has given way to official monolingualism, with no recognition of local heritage languages. As outlined above, Jamaican Creole is widely used in informal settings within Jamaica, and there have been some moves to involve formal usage and linguistic training at tertiary level (University of the West Indies Mona, 2021a, 2021b). With regard to the use of the moribund Trinidadian French Creole, some teaching of the language exists at university level (University of the West Indies St. Augustine – Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics, 2021), but there appear to be no similar programmes available for Trinidad & Tobago English Creole. Turning to the use of Spanish in the Trinidad & Tobago context, as also noted in the author's previous study (Hoyte-West, 2021), it can be argued that the Venezuelan situation is leading to a form of SAFFL in practice, given that the language, as part of a "new normal" (Blackburn, 2019), is increasingly becoming part of the nation's day-to-day existence.

The fourth and final part of Spolsky's (2004) model examines the concept of minority language rights. In the Caribbean, the International Centre for Caribbean Language Research (ICCLR) Working Group has been advocating for greater linguistic rights. To this end, a Charter on Language Policy and Language Rights in the Creole-Speaking Caribbean was created (Brown-Blake, 2014; International Centre for Caribbean Language Research, 2011), with calls not only to respect the rights of minority languages and their speakers (as per the UNESCO's Charter of Cultural Diversity), but also to propose the creation of a Regional Council for Creole Languages. As mentioned before, the Jamaican Language Unit at UWI Mona promotes the right to use Jamaican Creole in education and public life, and also serves as the body responsible for developing the necessary terminology required for the administrative and legal sectors (see, for example Blake & Devonish, 1994; Devonish & Carpenter, 2007; University of the West Indies Mona, 2021a, 2021b). In addition, recent research on reforming the justice system in Jamaica has foregrounded the concept of changes to the country's language policy to accommodate the fact that many of those interacting with the country's legal system are not proficient in English but rather in Jamaican Creole, thus advocating recognition of bilingualism in that regard (Brown-Blake, 2017). Turning southwards to the Trinidad & Tobago context, no such provisions regarding minority language rights appear to exist at the time of writing. Nonetheless, given the current geopolitical situation, it can be argued that Spanish is indeed becoming a "minority" language in the country owing to the Venezuelan refugee crisis (Chami & Seemungal, 2021), with corresponding implications for the provision of relevant linguistic and other services.

Concluding remarks and suggestions for further research

This exploratory contribution has aimed to outline how Spolsky's (2004) theoretical model of language policy applies to the sociolinguistic contexts of Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, with a focus on the roles played by Creoles and Spanish in both countries. In providing an overview of the current situation, it is clear that it is not a question of conflict between different minority or minoritised languages – i.e. between Spanish and the relevant English-based creoles – but rather the focused aims appear to be different in each country. In Jamaica, despite general lack of official recognition, the focus seems to be on Jamaican Creole as the country's own language, with moves to recognise Spanish as

Jamaica's first foreign language still at an embryonic stage. In Trinidad & Tobago, conversely, official moves to recognise Spanish through the SAFFL initiative are well-advanced, and it is the country's English-based creole language that suffers from a general lack of wider recognition and status.

To reiterate the core tenets of Spolsky's (2004) framework in this context, it can be argued that, in terms of national ideology, ethnocultural diversity does not generally extend to acknowledgement of linguistic diversity. As per the role of English, it remains to all intents and purposes dominant – at least through its status as the only official language – but remains on a linguistic continuum with the local English-based creoles. With regard to sociolinguistic diversity, these creoles, however, are largely ignored by governments and wider officialdom, whereas Spanish is courted as a prestigious foreign language. Yet, turning to minority language rights, it remains to be seen if moves towards wider recognition of the creoles – as Brown-Blake (2017) advocates in her study of the Jamaican justice system – will be something that occurs at a future date.

In short, this preliminary overview has illustrated that, in the Jamaican and Trinidad & Tobago contexts, Spolsky's (2004) model displays considerable overlap between the different sectors. Given that this is, to the author's knowledge, the first time that this model has been applied to the Caribbean context, it could be argued that this blurring between the sectors may reflect sociolinguistic aspects relating specifically to postcolonial societies in the western hemisphere; however, more research will need to be done. Accordingly, there is a need for further comparative work with other small states in the region, in order to provide a panorama of the relevant sociolinguistic situations in the given jurisdictions, as well as to judge the validity of this claim.

In addition, it was felt that the information gained through this exploratory literature-based analysis could also be complemented by further qualitative work, including interviews, surveys, and focus groups with policymakers, language professionals, and members of the general public. Building on the framework posited by Spolsky (2004) and the resulting analysis of the insights gleaned, it is to be hoped that, via ascertaining real-life perspectives on Spanish and Creole languages not solely in Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago but also across the broader Anglophone Caribbean, real change can occur regarding the promulgation and status of these languages in the wider Caribbean context.

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Spanish and Creole: Exploring Aspects of Minority and Minoritised Languages in Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago

As the two largest countries in the Anglophone Caribbean, the sole official language of both Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago is English. This status, however, does not accommodate the historical and contemporary multilingualism common to both countries. Mindful of the islands' colonial past, as well as their geographical proximity to Latin America, the government of Trinidad & Tobago has designated Spanish as the country's official foreign language, and there have been calls for the same move to be made in Jamaica. Even though Spanish is very much a minority language in both nations in terms of the number of speakers, this move has associated implications for the education sectors. In addition, it has been argued that this mandate also denigrates autochthonous Creole languages, which are spoken widely in both countries but generally have no formal place in education or public life. Accordingly, this preliminary literature-based study examines relevant Jamaican and Trinidad & Tobago policies through the lens of the language policy model originally developed by Bernard Spolsky in 2004, which foregrounds the four interlinked concepts of national ideology, the role of English, a country's sociolinguistic structure, and minority language rights. Particular attention will be focused on current initiatives regarding the latter, as well as seeking to examine how governmental emphasis on Spanish – given the existence of these local Creole languages – is viewed within the Jamaican and Trinidad & Tobago contexts.

Keywords:

language policy; minority languages; creole languages; Jamaica; Trinidad & Tobago; Anglophone Caribbean

Język hiszpański i języki kreolskie: sytuacja języków mniejszościowych i marginalizowanych na Jamajce oraz Trynidadzie i Tobago – rekonesans badawczy

Jamajka oraz Trynidad i Tobago to dwa największe kraje anglojęzycznych Karaibów. Choć w każdym z nich język angielski stanowi jedyny język oficjalny, jego status nie uwzględnia wspólnej dla obu krajów historycznej i współczesnej wielojęzyczności. Z uwagi na kolonialną przeszłość wysp, a także geograficzną bliskość Ameryki Łacińskiej, rząd Trynidadu i Tobago ustanowił język hiszpański oficjalnym językiem obcym kraju, a podobne propozycje pojawiły się również na Jamajce. Pomimo że hiszpański w obydwu państwach stanowi bez wątpienia język mniejszościowy pod względem liczby użytkowników, działania te miały istotne konsekwencje dla sektora edukacji. Wśród reakcji pojawiły się także głosy mówiące, że zarządzenie to uderza w rodzime języki kreolskie, pozostające w powszechnym użyciu w obu krajach, nieposiadające jednak formalnego miejsca w edukacji ani życiu publicznym. Niniejsza praca, oparta na dostępnej literaturze, stanowi wstępną analizę polityki Jamajki oraz Trynidadu i Tobago przeprowadzoną przez pryzmat modelu polityki językowej opracowanego przez Bernarda Spolsky'ego w 2004 roku. Model ten wysuwa na pierwszy plan cztery wzajemnie powiązane zagadnienia: ideologię narodową, rolę języka angielskiego, strukturę socjolingwistyczną kraju i prawa językowe mniejszości. Uwaga została zwrócona szczególnie na bieżące inicjatywy dotyczące ostatniego z wymienionych aspektów, a także na zbadanie, jak nacisk władz na naukę języka hiszpańskiego postrzegany jest w kontekście lokalnych języków kreolskich Jamajki oraz Trynidadu i Tobago.

Słowa kluczowe:

polityka językowa; języki mniejszościowe; języki kreolskie; Jamajka; Trynidad i Tobago; Karaiby anglojęzyczne

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